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ABSTRACT

The goal of transition planning is to bridge the gap between the mandated special education services provided by public schools and the entitlement systems under which adult services operate. This paper is designed to assist parents in understanding the transition planning process. In a question-and-answer format, information is presented to address the most frequent concerns of parents of secondary students with disabilities. The information covers: methods for assisting the student to make the transition from school to work, the effects of employment on Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid benefits, description of an Individual Written Transition Plan (IWTP), how the IWTP helps in acquiring necessary services and employment after graduation, how the IWTP addresses students' community living skills and social and leisure needs, and the importance of long-range planning. (JDD)

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Planning for Transition:

Answers for Parents

CETVE Monograph #2

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Preparing students to make a successful transition from school to adult life is the ultimate objective of secondary education. Yet despite the legal mandate of PL 94-142, school services have failed to impact positively upon the estimated 50-75% unemployment rate among adults with disabilities (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1983). For parents of students with disabilities who are currently graduating from public schools, the lack of employment options is especially disturbing. The promise of PL 94-142 is unfulfilled for students and their parents when they face unemployment, underemployment, or only sheltered work for trivial wages upon graduation. A gap exists between the mandated special education services provided by public schools and the entitlement systems under which adult services operate. Bridging that gap is the goal of transition planning.

This paper is designed to assist parents to understand the transition planning process. Understanding of the process of effective transition planning will enable parents to take a more active role in advocating for appropriate services for their sons/daughters both within the school curriculum and among adult service agencies. Informed parents and students are better able to participate in the team effort of drafting and implementing individual and written transition plans that achieve employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

Transition planning is a team effort that must begin early. Early intervention ensures that the secondary school years can be used to address the vocational needs of students well before they enter the workforce. In addition, early identification of appropriate adult service agencies allows students and parents time to enter service systems that often maintain waiting lists for long periods before openings occur for new clients.

The following questions and answers are presented in an effort to address the most frequent concerns of parents of secondary students with disabilities relative to transition. The purpose of this discussion is to give parents a starting point in their efforts to begin transition planning for their sons/daughters as the enter and exit secondary school.

1. How can I help my son/daughter to make the transition from school to work?

The most important thing you can do is to get involved with your son/daughter's school when your son/daughter starts secondary school. Become an active member of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team and Transition Team and advocate for your child's needs relative to

vocational training long before graduation day. In this way, you can establish communication links within the school that will keep you abreast of what the school offers to train students with disabilities for work.

You will also discover the program deficits that your school needs to address. For example, your school may need to establish work experiences and community-based training programs. If you approach these needs positively, you can impact on the administration or school system to create more appropriate services for all students. Often parents have a stronger voice for systemic change with the administration or school board than the teachers within the school. In any case, it is important to work with the school personnel to identify program needs and to advocate for new programs.

As an active participant in the Transition planning process, you can assist the school in identifying and securing appropriate services for your son/daughter after graduation. Many job leads are secured by contacts with the students' family or friends. In addition, your efforts to find community services will further extend the list of resources available for all students, not just your son/daughter.

Finally, establish a team approach to dealing with the problem of transition. Together, parents and teachers can extend their talents and resources to solve a great majority of problems that will present themselves. Working as a team you can more quickly realize your goal of finding appropriate jobs, transportation, post-secondary education, leisure interests, and social relationships for your son/daughter when they graduate. The process for establishing this team is for your school to begin transition planning for each student and for each student to have an Individual Written Transition Plan developed by the transition team.

2. What is an Individual Written Transition Plan?

An Individual Written Transition Plan (IWTP) is a written plan developed by teachers and ancillary staff within the school and the adult service providers in the community along with the students and his/her family that provides a smooth transition for each student as they leave secondary school and enter the world of work. An IWTP functions in the same way that an IEP functions except that the IWTP extends beyond the school years and projects goals and identifies services for each student as they graduate. Ideally, transition planning should begin early in the secondary years so that appropriate vocational experiences can be designed for students within the secondary program. In addition, early transition planning makes the best use of community based training and work experiences prior to

high school graduation. The IWTP is designed to focus attention on the knowledge and experiences students with disabilities will need to be successful in the world of work as well as to identify the resources and services the student will need upon graduation to make a successful transition. For more information on Transition Plans, see CETVE Monograph #3 - Writing Transition Plans.

3. How can the Individual Written Transition Plan help my son/daughter to get the services he/she needs after graduation from secondary school?

First, the IWTP should be used to guide curriculum planning for your son/daughter such that he/she receives the educational and vocational experiences targeted to his/her needs for post-school education or entrance into competitive employment. It is vital that the IWTP begin early in the secondary years and that you, as parents, become active participants in this planning process.

Through the IWTP you will know what post-school vocational options are deemed most appropriate for your son/daughter, given their individual strengths and limitations. As graduation approaches the Transition team along with you and your son/daughter will begin to identify the community services your son/daughter will need after school ends. These services will be identified along with the names of the staff within these agencies who your son/daughter will contact. Ideally, these service providers should be invited to be a part of the transition team so that they can offer their guidance in planning services for your son/daughter. Ultimately the IWTP should give you a blueprint to follow so that you can have your son/daughter involved with all the appropriate community services he/she will need at the point of graduation.

4. How can the IWTP help my son/daughter to find work after graduation?

The IWTP can prescribe various employment programs such as the Jobs Training and Partnership Act programs funded by local Private Industry Councils in most communities. Traditional placement programs exist in most communities such as the Employment Security Commission and for-profit employment services. Some communities have time-limited vocational training programs usually funded through vocational rehabilitation at local sheltered workshops.

For students with severe disabilities the IWTP can identify Supported Employment programs which are operated by sheltered workshops or by adult day service centers. Supported Employment

programs include job coach models, mobile crews, work stations in industry, and small businesses. With supported employment many students with severe disabilities can now achieve and maintain competitive work in the community for the same wages and benefits as their non-disabled co-workers.

5. How will my son/daughter's SSI and Medicaid benefits be affected when he/she gets a job?

This question cannot be answered in an absolute manner for all students. Each student and his/her employment placement will affect SSI and Medicaid benefits differently depending on the amount of money earned, benefits received, etc. In the past, competitive employment usually meant that SSI and Medicaid benefits ceased and the process to reestablish these when employment terminated was often arduous and sometimes, unsuccessful. However, recently many of the disincentives to employment have been removed from the eligibility criteria for receiving these benefits after employment have been removed from the eligibility criteria for receiving these benefits after employment. To make this determination the transition team must consult with the Social Security and Medicaid offices prior to accepting a job placement.

6. How will the IWTP address the social and leisure needs of my son/daughter?

The IWTP can be useful in identifying community-based and leisure activities appropriate for you son/daughter to pursue after graduation. Ideally, you should encourage your son/daughter to become involved in community leisure activities such as sports events, team sports, arts and crafts classes, and social gatherings that are integrated. Social and leisure activities with non-disabled peers reinforce skills necessary for competitive work and enhance the quality of life for your son/daughter.

Frequently, school personnel overlook the value of leisure or social goals in the IWTP in their effort to achieve work oriented outcomes for students. As parents, you can suggest that appropriate leisure and social goals be added to the IWTP and you can stress the importance of these skills to successful transition not just for work but for a healthy adjustment to community living.

7. How will the IWTP address my son/daughter's need to learn community living skills such as the use of public transportation, shopping skills, public behavior skills and community access skills?

Community living skills are essential to independent living. Obviously your son/daughter needs to learn to access public transportation (or where public transit is unavailable be able to take part in car-pool arrangements) to get to his/her competitive employment training as worksite. However, once the employment objective is reached the IWTP often stops short of teaching the other community access skills necessary for independent living.

Parents should stress the importance of community-based training during secondary school so that students will have many opportunities to learn to handle money, comparison shop, and use public facilities. These are also skills that the family can stress as a function of daily life. Your son/daughter with a severe disability needs your guidance to practice how to shop for the family, or plan and implement family outtings, etc.

The IWTP should also reflect the need to teach or reinforce independent community living within adult service agencies. Skills essential to effectively grasp home or apartment living should be stressed (if these are realistic options for your son/daughter). Learning to use community resources independently will be an ongoing process for most young people with severe disabilities. Parents should have many opportunities to encourage the inclusion of these goals in the educational plans for their sons/daughters.

8. <u>What long range plans should I make to provide for my son/daughter's future after graduation</u>?

Long range planning for your son/daughter's future should include: a) making a determination concerning legal guardianship (if your son/daughter is severely disabled and is unable to be their own legal representative); b) Making plans for your son/daughter's financial future with regard to establishing trust funds, or saving plans for the future; and c) arranging for family members or other individuals to manage affairs for your son/daughter after the death of both parents.

If transition planning has been effective, immediate vocational training needs and or employment placement, housing needs etc. should be established at the point of graduation. The adult service system in the various agency services your son/daughter receives should conduct case management throughout the adult years. Re-training or new employment placements should be implemented as needed for your son/daughter.

In conclusion, we have attempted to answer the most often asked questions. Should you have further questions please call (704-547-

2531) or write us c/o - Special Education Programs, UNCC, Charlotte, NC 28223 or contact your local Association for Retarded Citizens, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, or Developmental Disabilities Association.